



# Waldo H. Heinrichs, George D. Aiken, and the Lend Lease Debate of 1941

*The national debate over Lend Lease centered on Congress; the contest aimed at winning the votes of state delegations in Washington. Vermont's all-Republican delegation had a solid record of support for Roosevelt's measures to aid Britain in 1940. The question was whether that record of unified support could be extended to the more controversial Lend Lease bill.*

By WALDO H. HEINRICHS JR.<sup>1</sup>

**T**his is a story of Americans in a small state wrestling with the issue of going to war. It examines the debate in Vermont in early 1941 over the Lend Lease bill, which would provide aid to Great Britain, but with the attendant risk of war with Germany. The article focuses on the perspectives of the principal proponent of the bill, Professor Waldo H. Heinrichs of Middlebury College, and the principal opponent, Senator George D. Aiken.

The nature of the national debate on Lend Lease will be better understood by assembling a mosaic of state debates than by painting with a broad brush nationally. Local circumstances—political, cultural, economic—shaped these debates and strongly affected their outcomes. In this framework, the small state of Vermont offers a manageable unit of analysis and fresh insights.

The issue of providing arms and other war material to Britain raised the fundamental question of the extent to which, if at all, the United States should involve itself in the European war. The fight over Lend Lease was a critical moment in the history of American foreign relations, when the nation finally decided that its well-being, and indeed existence, depended on discarding aloofness from world politics. It would

participate in the world struggle by supplying arms to Britain, even at the risk of war. It went on to become the leading power of that war, the Cold War, and the early twenty-first century. By offering an intensive, public, legislative scrutiny of policy, the Lend Lease debate provided an excellent opportunity for democratic opinion formation—really the only one—on the question of intervention in the war.

The burning question was not about the right to sell American arms to Britain in its time of dire need (that was already allowed), but rather how Britain was to pay for them when its supply of dollars was vanishing. The answer embodied in Lend Lease was for the American government to purchase the entire output of arms and “lend” appropriate portions of it to countries fighting the dictators. Legislation to that effect came before Congress in January 1941 and was the centerpiece of nationwide debate over the next ten weeks.

American opinion on policy toward the European war ran the gamut from total isolation to a call for declaration of war. On Lend Lease a blurry line of division formed: Proponents argued that German victory in Europe would pose a fundamental threat to American security and urged all assistance short of war to sustain Britain. Opponents considered the argument of German threat less than compelling and insisted on maintaining America’s neutrality and traditional distance from Europe’s quarrels. Many hovered in between.

Organizations existed on both sides to muster opinion. The Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies (CDA) represented the interventionists. Chaired by William Allen White, a Republican newspaper editor from Kansas, CDA drew the cosmopolitans: leaders from finance, the arts, communications, education, and some churches.

The leading opposition organization was America First, a more heterogeneous group including traditionalists, set in their hemispheric view of American security, as well as right-wing Roosevelt haters, those inheriting the Populist suspicion of Britain and its imperialism, and Americans soured on internationalism by the First World War and the Versailles peace. Also opposing Lend Lease, though not generally members of America First, were pacifists and internationalist peace activists. CDA had 750 local chapters and America First 648.<sup>2</sup>

The Vermont chapter of CDA formed in the summer of 1940 to press for sending aid to besieged Britain. President Paul D. Moody of Middlebury College was chair; Professors Paul D. Evans of the University of Vermont and Waldo H. Heinrichs, Sr. of Middlebury College served as co-secretaries.

Heinrichs’s involvement in the Lend Lease debate arose from powerful convictions drawn from extensive international experience. He



*Waldo H. Heinrichs in 1958. Courtesy of the author.*

was born in British India of Baptist missionary parents. Upon graduating from Denison University in 1913, he began a career in the international Y.M.C.A., interrupted by service in the First World War. A pursuit (fighter) pilot, he was shot down, severely wounded, and taken prisoner by the Germans. After the war he earned an MA in history at Columbia University, returned to the Y.M.C.A. abroad in India, and then took on the imposing task of running the handsome new “Y” in

Jerusalem, Palestine, open to all faiths in a city taut with Arab-Jewish antagonism under the British mandate.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1920s Heinrichs believed in a new Wilsonian world order that would lead to the gradual reduction of armaments, imperialism, and conflict. In 1926 he was so impressed with a sermon on education for world peace that he decided never to fight again and removed his service lapel button and Croix de Guerre ribbon “as evidences of a militarism that must be passé in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

The button and ribbon returned in the 1930s. Coming to Middlebury in 1934, Heinrichs developed “Contemporary Civilization” as a course in recent and current world politics, which just then were becoming radically transformed with the rise of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. In 1936 and 1939 he joined study tours to Europe that offered meetings with prominent officials of the countries that would be at war in 1941. In 1939 he managed to wangle his way into German-occupied Czechoslovakia to talk with people under Nazi domination.

These years of travel and teaching, as well as the writings of contemporary students of world affairs, especially Hermann Rauschning and Frederick L. Schuman, convinced Heinrichs that Nazi Germany was a mortal threat to all free peoples.<sup>5</sup> At the time of the Munich crisis he wrote in his diary, “I am daily getting more and more full of hatred of Hitler and Mussolini.” The appeasers were “yellow-bellied skin-savers. Just at the moment of victory . . . [they] completely capitulate.”<sup>6</sup> By 1941 Heinrichs’s Wilsonian values were expressed in the language of power.

The campaign for Lend Lease in Vermont began promptly. Successfully seeking out local leaders, CDA formed chapters in Vergennes, Middlebury, Barre, Rutland, Northfield, St. Johnsbury, and Windsor as well as other cities and towns.<sup>7</sup> Heinrichs noted in his diary on January 1, 1941, that his actions on behalf of the committee the previous summer put “our state in the forefront of the pressure group trying to get all possible aid to Britain.”<sup>8</sup> CDA was ready for action.

The Vermont press strongly favored Lend Lease. Four principal dailies, the *Burlington Free Press*, *Rutland Herald*, *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, and *Bennington Evening Banner*, gave editorial support to the bill. The *Caledonian Record* was a lonely voice of opposition from the Northeast Kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

The press provided a forum for debate by reporting speeches on the issue in the state, noting public meetings and community petitions, and publishing open letters and letters to the editor. Vermont press reporting of national speeches by Colonel Charles Lindbergh, other American Firsters, and Senate isolationists was counterbalanced by reports of testimony by high administration officials such as Cordell Hull and General

George C. Marshall, and by a chorus of editorialists. Leading Vermont newspapers had extensive coverage of international events and the *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune* provided same-day delivery in parts of Vermont. Heinrichs required his students to read either the *Times* or the *Herald Tribune*. Nightly Vermonters tuned in to radio news and commentary from Edward R. Murrow's expert reporting team in Europe, hearing, for example, of the latest German bombing raids on British cities.

Sentiment for Lend Lease was strongest in the cities and towns of western and southern Vermont. Pockets of activism existed in St. Johnsbury and Barre, but the main lines of support ran along the Route 7 corridor and the lower Connecticut Valley. Vermont elites—business, professional, literary, academic, political—were preponderantly pro-Lend Lease.<sup>10</sup> The organizing list of Fight For Freedom, an offshoot of CDA, read like “the entire society of Vermont,” according to one member, “anybody who was anybody in the state.”<sup>11</sup>

The opposition to Lend Lease was unorganized and weakly represented in the media. Nationally, America First “lacked the organizational structure and strategic design to exploit popular sentiment,” in the judgment of historian James C. Schneider. During the election of 1940 it put its emphasis on radio broadcasts and national advertising, whereas CDA stressed a grassroots membership drive and formation of local chapters. Consequently CDA was better prepared to rouse opinion after the 1940 election when Lend Lease was introduced; America First, according to Schneider, was caught “flatfooted.”<sup>12</sup> Vermont non-interventionists, lacking outside help and perhaps the sense of crisis and urgency that characterized CDA, were not strong enough to create local chapters before or during the debate, or a state chapter until September 1941.<sup>13</sup>

The most vigorous and sustained resistance to Lend Lease in Vermont came from the pulpit. Protestant clergy in surprising numbers spoke out against the drift to war, including the Congregational ministers of Danby, Fair Haven, and Middlebury.<sup>14</sup> Leading the way was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) of Burlington, a lingering vestige of the peace activism of the 1920s. Nationally, FOR condemned militarism and imperialism and strove for disarmament and nonviolent modes of international conduct.<sup>15</sup> Among Catholics, word from their leading cleric in the state, Bishop Matthew Ryan of Burlington, that the United States must mind its own business in the face of the European war, carried weight with Vermonters of French Canadian, Irish, and Italian backgrounds.<sup>16</sup>

Many Vermonters were probably indifferent to or unaware of Lend Lease; most did not stand up to be counted. However, some “ordinary”

people of Vermont, “window washers, masons, carpenters, janitors,” as Ralph Nading Hill, an America First member, described them, did voice their fears of another war and bitter opposition to Lend Lease.<sup>17</sup> Such people—artisans, farmers, small business owners, laborers—represented village Vermont, resentful of the demands and values of an intrusive modern, industrial America.

Fear of Lend Lease leading to war was obviously a concern of Vermonters of draft age and their families, as well as families of National Guard members who boarded trains for Florida to join the 43rd Infantry Division as it entered federal service.<sup>18</sup> Heinrichs encountered a number of these Vermonters in his role as champion of Lend Lease.

The national debate over Lend Lease centered on Congress; the contest aimed at winning the votes of state delegations in Washington. Vermont’s all-Republican delegation had a solid record of support for Roosevelt’s measures to aid Britain in 1940. The question was whether that record of unified support could be extended to the more controversial Lend Lease bill.

Vermont’s representative, Charles Plumley, sought restrictive amendments to the Lend Lease bill but his ultimate support was not in question. Senator Warren Austin was a staunch advocate. America would fight if it had to, he thundered to gallery applause, because “a world enslaved is worse than war.”<sup>19</sup> Vermont’s other senator, Ernest W. Gibson Jr., had been no less outspoken in advocating maximum aid to Britain. However, he had served only to finish the term of his father and in January 1941 he took over leadership of the national CDA from William Allen White. Newly elected Senator George D. Aiken had just completed two terms as governor of Vermont. Thus, in a narrow sense the CDA campaign in Vermont was all about capturing that one vote of Aiken’s.

Aiken and Gibson, both from Windham County, were longtime friends and political intimates. Both were Republicans in the Progressive tradition, but with a significant difference. Like Theodore Roosevelt, Gibson accepted an enhanced role for the federal government in reform and had a keen interest in military affairs, which Aiken entirely lacked. Aiken believed that the initiative for reform should come from the states. His battles as governor with the Roosevelt administration over New Deal programs for hydroelectric power and flood control in Vermont left him inveterately suspicious of any increase in presidential power. Aiken’s progressivism stayed close to home.<sup>20</sup>

During Aiken’s senatorial campaign, in the months before the Lend Lease debate, he had seemed alive to the threat posed by German conquest of Europe, but guarded on issues of aid to Britain. In July 1940 Heinrichs wrote the governor to inquire about his position on steps

CDA was urging the president and Congress to take. Aiken responded that he would permit the sale of arms after making “very sure these materials are *not* needed by our own country.” “Adequate defense of America is more imperative than diffusions of our war resources . . . even to friendly nations,” he insisted. “Our ultimate safety lies in having the world’s greatest air force.” Heinrichs declared himself “completely satisfied” with Aiken’s response, pointing out, however, that the Vermont American Legion, four thousand strong, stood “100% for increasing aid to the utmost possible extent of our capacity to Great Britain.”<sup>21</sup>

During the campaign Aiken usually parried questions on foreign policy, “too modestly disavowing any knowledge” on the subject, Heinrichs told him. A newspaper columnist feared readers might weary from all the issues Aiken was “not up on.” His reserve was a shrewd tactic, however, since he left his opponent in the Republican primary, Ralph E. Flanders, president of Jones and Lamson Machine Tools, engaging in controversial issues of defense and foreign policy while the governor dealt from strength in the domestic sphere.<sup>22</sup> Flanders discovered the difficulty of engaging in such issues when he made what the *Boston Globe* described as the “astounding” suggestion that conscription could be postponed until after industrial machinery was geared up.<sup>23</sup>

Standing on his reformist record as governor, Aiken warned of the sacrifice of liberties that resulted from the centralization of power at Washington under the Democrats. He portrayed himself as the defender of the “common folk” against the state political machine of the Proctor family and the railroad and public utility interests represented by Flanders. At the American Legion convention he warned of the rise of a new class of war profiteers. A small percentage of people, he claimed, held great advantages over farmers, workers, small business owners, and professional groups. The “average man,” Aiken’s campaign manager claimed, “is with us.”<sup>24</sup>

Aiken was vaguely favorable to aid for Britain but not willing to define it as crucial. He thereby reassured those constituents fearful of foreign entanglements that might lead to another war. At the same time his Progressivism drew the support of reform-minded Vermonters such as Heinrichs, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and Wilder Foote, editor of the *Middlebury Register*.

Aiken won the primary by some 8,500 votes, ensuring victory in the general election in Republican Vermont. He came to Washington as cautious and enigmatic about Lend Lease as he had been on foreign policy issues during the campaign.

CDA made every effort to build statewide pressure for a unified favorable vote on Lend Lease by the state’s delegation in Congress.

Upon word that Senator Austin needed “every possible support” for his pro-Lend Lease stand, Heinrichs notified him, this time as chair of the National Defense Committee of the Vermont American Legion, that the state Legion endorsed aid to Britain and urged the Congressional delegation to implement the resolution immediately.<sup>25</sup>

The chair of the Windham County Democratic Committee wrote town committees asking their chairs to write Congress urging unlimited aid for Britain, China, and Greece. With the defeat of those nations, he said, it would only be a matter of time before *Mein Kampf* was substituted for the Bible.<sup>26</sup>

The Vermont Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution urging material aid to Britain. Speeches on behalf of the resolution were printed in *The Vermonter*, a monthly magazine of public affairs, and this issue, with a letter from the Chamber president, went to all members of Congress. The Vermont House of Representatives passed a resolution supporting Lend Lease with the amendments offered by Senator Austin.<sup>27</sup>

An editorial in the *New York Herald Tribune* paid tribute to Vermont’s support of Lend Lease. Vermonters were known, it pointed out, for “a rugged insistence on their freedom that is sometimes the despair of more pliant folk.” Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys were “quite willing to defend their territory against New York or New Hampshire as against the British. . . . It is comforting to know that we have a tough core of such traditions at a time when the threat to freedom is worldwide.”<sup>28</sup>

CDA also sought to raise public interest in local communities by providing speakers and organizing debates. Middlebury, Vermont, provides a good example. Among those supporting Lend Lease in Middlebury, aside from President Moody and Heinrichs, were: C. A. Ingalls, president of the Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Howard I. Slocum, osteopath and community leader; Rev. T. J. Leonard, priest of St. Mary’s Catholic Church; William Hazlett Upson, author of the Alexander Botts stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*; Frank E. Howard, professor of psychology, and A. M. Cline, professor of history, both at Middlebury College; John T. Conley, state’s attorney; and Wilder Foote, editor of the *Middlebury Register*.<sup>29</sup>

Heinrichs spoke twice in Middlebury, once at the Chamber of Commerce and again at the first of two community forums arranged for debating the issues. Before a disappointing forum crowd of sixty to eighty people Ellsworth B. Cornwall opposed Lend Lease, contending that America would lose its democracy by joining the war and that attack on the Western Hemisphere was impossible; the Germans had been unable even to cross the English Channel. More of the “usual weak . . . ar-

guments of the isolationists," Heinrichs noted. Ruth Hastings followed with a middle-of-the-road position advocating aid to Britain short of risking war, which Heinrichs found essentially no different from Cornwall's stance. Heinrichs then gave the "Political, Military, and Economic reasons for an *all-out* effort to aid Britain."

He was sure he "had them cold" and that the "intelligentsia" were with him, but he admitted that "all the pacifists of FOR . . . would not be convinced." At the Chamber of Commerce he had taken a crack at "laggards, pacifists, appeasers and left them *not much disturbed*." In fact three of five Middlebury pastors opposed him: William Hastings of the Congregational Church, Arthur H. Gordon of the Baptist Church, and Charles Whiston of the Episcopal Church.<sup>30</sup> Also opposed was Everett Skillings, professor of German at Middlebury, who had seen the carnage of the First World War, turned to Quaker pacifism, and formed a study group of student pacifists.<sup>31</sup>

Student pacifism was a contentious issue at the college. At a required chapel vespers service, Dr. John Thomas, former Middlebury president, strongly urged Americans as Christians to help Britain with material and military aid. An editorial in the college newspaper, *The Campus*, asserting that the American people did not want war, condemned the speech as exhorting students, in a compulsory setting, to support war. Chapel should not be used to "exploit political opinions," stated a letter to the editor. Heinrichs, who deplored pacifist tendencies of students, was reluctant to interfere with a student newspaper but, pressed to comment, allowed that *Campus* editorials were short on facts and long on "sloppy and wishful thinking."<sup>32</sup>

Heinrichs devoted most of his effort for CDA to speeches. He gave roughly a dozen on Lend Lease, traveling as far as winter driving permitted, to Burlington, Brandon, Lincoln, New Haven, Rutland, and other towns. On the Brandon occasion, his wife, Dorothy P. Heinrichs, spoke as well.<sup>33</sup>

His argument in these speeches was consistent and forceful. Failure to help Britain, he asserted, would not keep the United States out of war because Hitler sought world domination, required the resources of the Western Hemisphere, and had plans for its conquest. More profoundly, Nazi Germany represented the forces of evil. The current war was not a war of imperialism but a world revolution, a "death struggle" between totalitarian and democratic ideologies, a matter of the survival of Christian civilization. With Hitler, compromise or appeasement were impossible. Life under Nazi rule was not worth living. Americans must face the reality of a world dominated by force, Heinrichs declared. Those nations fighting the totalitarian powers were fighting our battle.

Our only chance to avoid war was aid to Britain now. If Britain fell, chances were overwhelming we could not avoid war alone against Germany, which would have greatly superior military forces.

We must not fall into an "Atlantic complex," like the French "Maginot Line complex," he warned. That was "pure self-deception." Isolationists and "sincere" pacifists were playing into the hands of Hitler, who was seeking to divide the country. Time was of the essence: Heinrichs foresaw an all-out invasion of Britain in the coming spring. Ernest Gibson, Jr., chair of CDA, spoke twice in Vermont along the same lines. The world, he said, paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, could not afford to exist four-fifths slave and one-fifth free.<sup>34</sup>

Speeches and editorials encouraged petitions and resolutions. Among those urging passage of Lend Lease were the Middlebury Rotary Club, the Springfield Elks, the South Shaftsbury Town Meeting, the Bennington and Rutland Chambers of Commerce, and 260 individuals from Saxton's River.<sup>35</sup>

The question was whether such speeches and pressures would gain the vote of Senator Aiken. He seemed to be straddling the fence, leaning forward in concern to aid Britain and then backward in fear of the immense powers the bill conferred on the president. Yet, given the positions he took in the senatorial campaign, it is hard to imagine him leaning far toward a "yes" vote at any time. What development since the election made Britain's survival more critical to the United States? Was there a greater need now to risk war and lose faith with the "common folk" of Vermont who had just boosted him to victory? Was the Vermont press any more prescient now in unified support of Lend Lease than it had been when united in opposing his nomination? Was there any likely amendment to the bill that would substantially curtail the powers conferred on the president? All these questions Aiken probably would have answered in the negative. On February 25 he rose for his maiden speech before the Senate and announced he would vote "no."

Aiken stated that he had listened day after day to great men testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but looked in vain for "just one" of the "common people of America" to tell his story. He saw these "ordinary folks" when he went "back to the hills of Vermont" over the previous weekend. "The farm and village folks of my state," he said, "do not want war," and this bill would give the president the power to put the country into any war.

The speech was a powerful statement of the bitter world view of a fading rural America. It was charged with the Populist anti-imperialism of earlier decades and the sourness of betrayed ideals in the First World War. "When we have crushed Hitler, when the bodies of American

boys lie rotting in foreign lands, with whom shall we make peace?" he asked. "What do we plan for the countries we expect to crush?"

The foremost influence today, Aiken continued, was "fear, fear, fear"; not fear of survival but fear engendered by "those who fear for their dollars." "Unless they can arouse our people to a fighting pitch, unless they mislead them or fool them into a declaration of war . . . they are going to lose money."

These economic imperialists saw their flag waving in glory over the oil fields of Asia Minor and the plantations of the East Indies. These were the war profiteers, the "dollar patriots," who had provided the totalitarian powers with the tools and resources to wage war. These were the industrialists who after the war would sacrifice farmers' export markets to "place their goods in every country." "Thirty dollars a month is good enough pay for the boys in our army. . . . All they have to do is leave their jobs, their homes, their future, and it may be, die or come back blind or without legs or arms or minds. This is not much so long as we can save money for 'dollar patriots' who are driving America to war today."

For Aiken, going to war represented a failure to solve domestic problems. It would lead to national bankruptcy, one-party government, and the greatest suffering by the American farmer. America had defeated invasion before, when it was young and weak, at Hubbardton, Bennington, and Saratoga. It would do so again if necessary. He preferred to go home now "and face the wrath of the money powers of my state than . . . later and face the empty chairs and empty hearts in the homes of my neighbors." On March 6, Aiken repeated the speech over CBS radio.<sup>36</sup>

The speech set off the hottest phase of the Lend Lease debate in Vermont. Proponents used every means to change Aiken's mind. The *Burlington Free Press* editorialized that the speech sounded "too much like speeches two years ago which will be found in the records of the Chamber of Deputies of the now defunct Republic of France." The Town of Lincoln sent a petition disapproving of the speech; other towns felt encouraged to do the same. The *Free Press* conducted a poll of its readers, which showed that of 599 ballots, 81 percent disapproved of the Aiken speech and 19 percent approved. In response, CDA arranged for petitions opposing Aiken's vote to be placed in downtown Burlington in the vicinity of Church Street, at McAuliffe's Stationery Store and Alps Restaurant, and at Colodney's Food Market at the juncture of North Street and North Avenue, as well as in Shelburne, Waterbury, and Cambridge.<sup>37</sup>

Wilder Foote, in a *Middlebury Register* editorial, expressed his shock at finding Aiken in the ranks of the opposition "on so fundamental an issue." He pointed out that the American "money powers" included the "appease Hitler element of big business." Furthermore, the Senate

leaders in the present fight were the same ones who destroyed the chance of lasting peace after the First World War by preventing U.S. participation in the League of Nations.

With respect to the charge of granting too much power to the president, Foote noted that the nearest approach to excessive power in American history had been the senatorial dictatorship after the Civil War, while the extension of presidential power under strong presidents from Washington to Wilson had actually strengthened democracy. The “plain people” wanted peace but also the freedom to continue the “unfinished work of democracy.” This they could only do by “facing unpleasant facts and acting to defend their rights and win their future from their enemies with promptness and resolution and the irresistible strength given to a people both united and free.”<sup>38</sup>

The *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, no friend of Aiken, accused him of being a demagogue, setting class against class, the wealthy against the “common folks.” The *Caledonian Record* agreed with Aiken: Americans did not want to go to war.<sup>39</sup>

The Aiken speech did not, of course, find favor with Waldo Heinrichs. It was “impressive in its inconsistencies,” he wrote to the *Free Press*. One did not get peace “merely by wishing to keep out of war,” for it took only one to make war and “that one will be Hitler.” Asserting that Aiken misrepresented Vermonters, most of whom supported Lend Lease, Heinrichs appealed for immediate protest to Aiken. Delay of Lend Lease must be prevented, he warned, for the gravity of Britain’s situation was “tremendous.” He quoted Walter Darré, German minister of agriculture: “England must be destroyed as Carthage was destroyed and when the time comes America must follow.”<sup>40</sup>

In a statement to the Associated Press on March 3, Aiken charged that “apparently Professor Heinrichs would commit the United States to war.” This comment led to further development of Heinrichs’s public position.<sup>41</sup>

A central ambiguity of CDA—perhaps an unavoidable one—was that it did not address the question of going to war head-on. Support of Lend Lease implied acceptance of the risk of war. William Allen White’s resignation from CDA arose from his unwillingness to cross that line. Ernest Gibson, Jr., now chairing CDA, himself a strong interventionist who favored American naval escort of convoys, only with great difficulty was bridging the gap in CDA between those like himself and those fearful of moving too far ahead of the American public or personally averse to facing the question of war directly.<sup>42</sup> On March 4, Rev. Max Webster of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Burlington wrote Heinrichs and Professor Evans an open letter asking bluntly

whether they favored United States entry into the war. Heinrichs responded with a statement for the *Free Press*.

He said that if material aid called for presently did not prove to be enough, the United States would have to decide on “total war or abject peace.” It now appeared to him that employment of the American merchant marine, navy, and air force (as yet we had no combat-ready army forces to send) alone could save Britain. Therefore, he personally did favor an “immediate declaration of war on the totalitarian powers.” Such a declaration would “galvanize us for the supreme effort required.” He said he was “ashamed to have my country . . . ‘hire’ men to die for a cause which I believe is ours as much as theirs, and compel them to pay for that privilege.”<sup>43</sup> As Paul Evans noted, Waldo Heinrichs had responded to Max Webster’s challenge with “his usual forthrightness.”<sup>44</sup>

Despite every effort, Aiken did not change his mind. On March 8 he voted against Lend Lease and split the previously undivided Vermont delegation. The Senate, however, voted 56 to 35 in favor; the House had already voted 260 to 165 in favor. Aiken wrote Heinrichs on April 29 that his considered opinion was that the policy the U.S. was following was far more likely to result in the destruction of the British Empire than the German Empire. Heinrichs was not persuaded. Along with Moody and Evans he now moved beyond CDA to join the new pro-war public activist group, Fight For Freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Democratic debate is not always honey and flowers. Heinrichs’s message was designed to shock people out of complacency and people resent that. He received much support, to be sure, but also bitter and insulting letters.<sup>46</sup> Heinrichs was all wrong, wrote Gertrude Daniels; everyone, “Thank God,” was not thinking the way he did. “Your dictatorial manner smacks of the Hun and by your name I judge you have plenty of that blood in your veins.” The point was not that everyone thought as he did, Heinrichs responded, but that Aiken did not represent most Vermonters. Besides, he added, “German aviators did their best to shoot all the German blood out of me on September 7, 1918 in a single combat against eight so-called Huns.”

Several letters suggested that he volunteer to help the British fight. He would not be the one to die if America went to war, they complained, but rather “sons of the poor class.” He needed to talk to “good hard-working down to earth people . . . who are themselves of draft age,” wrote Dana Bowie. Heinrichs answered that his parents, as immigrants, had started at the bottom and that he had put himself through college by working summers as a laborer. He had tried thirteen times to get into the army and despite a First World War disability had passed the physical exam.<sup>47</sup>

A letter from Rev. Donald Trumbull of Fair Haven drew an angry response. Heinrichs characterized the letter as “so full of venom it did not merit a response.” Nevertheless, respond he did. Trumbull had used the old saw “Those who can do, those who can’t teach.” Such a slur, Heinrichs replied, was beneath contempt; he was “glad to defend a profession second to none in any respect.” Trumbull objected that the word “appeaser” had come to be a condemnation, “as though it were no longer ever right to try to get along with an opponent without enforcing your own will upon him!” To this Heinrichs replied: “If you Christian pacifists have any practical solution to the present situation, I should be very glad to know about it. . . . One cannot turn back the years . . . and the many missed opportunities are the tragedies of this period of history. . . . The fact is that there is now a war going on and if you have any solution other than superior force it will be quite a discovery.”

Central to the Lend Lease debate was the question of necessity. Did Germany pose a fundamental threat to the United States? In fact, as we know more fully now, the German navy was just then extending its campaign against British shipping into the central and western Atlantic. U-boat wolf packs intercepted convoys on a line running south from the southern tip of Greenland. On March 15–16 the battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* sank sixteen ships off the Grand Banks of Nova Scotia. In March British shipping losses were 500,000 tons and rising. The Atlantic was no longer a barrier to German expansion.<sup>48</sup>

The way the world looked from Main Street obviously differed greatly from the way it looked from the White House. The Roosevelt administration circumscribed terms of the Lend Lease debate, limiting it to Britain, Europe, and the Atlantic, and barely mentioning the Soviet Union and Japan, which figured critically in the coming months. This simplification was advantageous for the proponents of Lend Lease because it emphasized the familiar and proximate, at least for the eastern states. The cost was failure to widen the perspective of Americans commensurate with the widening of a conflict to global proportions. Furthermore, for security reasons the administration did not convey a realistic sense of the Battle of the Atlantic, nor of the defensive countermeasures taken by the United States. Thus, discussion of the threat posed by Germany to the security of the United States remained hypothetical and couched in generalities.

Nevertheless, stripped to its essentials, the argument of the proponents of Lend Lease, that circumstances required the United States to make foreign commitments risking war for its own protection, did correlate with external reality.

Nationally the Lend Lease debate was an essential validation of the president's first big step in bringing American weight to bear on the world balance of forces. Schneider, in his intensive study of the debate over intervention in Chicago, concluded that, in spite of its merits, the debate was flawed. It was marked by vilification of opponents and left a public torn and polarized instead of unified. The result appeared to him "deeply disturbing."<sup>49</sup> That is not the picture in Vermont.

The Vermont debate was coherent. In spite of the preponderance of proponents of Lend Lease and the absence of an America First organization, negative arguments were set forth strongly by pacifists and Aiken's Senate speech. Vermont was small enough to remain a single arena and develop a central narrative of challenge and response in the failed quest for Aiken's vote. Discourse was harsh and critical at times, but rarely ugly or smearing.

The debate undoubtedly consolidated and probably somewhat expanded majority sentiment in Vermont in favor of Lend Lease. The pervading and predominating pro-Lend Lease campaign and the large number of opinion leaders and organizations who made known their support for Lend Lease created a powerful momentum. It did not produce consensus; for a substantial minority of Vermonters the risk of war entailed in sustaining Britain outweighed any advantage in reducing the threat of Nazi Germany. Dominating their outlook was horror at the prospect of another war so soon after one so keenly remembered. What stands out is this fear, and not a sense of complacency about finding security in isolation. The debate was clarifying on both sides. It became apparent with Heinrichs's shift to support for a declaration of war that CDA's ambiguous position on the risk of war was no longer viable. Lend Lease was not a way to stay out of war any more than was isolation.

Public opinion is better seen as a process than a snapshot. In the case of the Lend Lease debate in Vermont, like the head of a caterpillar, the interventionists inched forward from CDA to Fight For Freedom, while the opposition, lacking convincing and practical alternatives, dragged along behind.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Professor Samuel B. Hand of the University of Vermont for reading an earlier version of this article, sharing with me his wisdom and knowledge of Vermont history, and pointing me toward further research.

<sup>2</sup> On the national debate, see Mark Chadwin, *The Hawks of World War II: American Intervention before Pearl Harbor* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Walter Johnson, *The Battle against Isolation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); Wayne Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953); James C. Schneider,

.....

*Should America Go to War? The Debate over Foreign Policy in Chicago, 1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). On Lend Lease: Warren Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend Lease, 1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>Information for this biographical sketch is from the Papers of Waldo H. Heinrichs, Divinity School Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. On Heinrichs's service in the First World War, see Charles Woolley, *First to the Front: The Aerial Adventures of Lt. Waldo Heinrichs and the 95th Aero Squadron, 1917–1918* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing Co., 1999).

<sup>4</sup>Diary of Waldo H. Heinrichs (hereafter WHH), 1 July 1926, Box 263, Heinrichs Papers.

<sup>5</sup>Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West* (New York: Alliance Press, 1939); Frederick L. Schuman, *Night over Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1941). Heinrichs's copy of the Schuman book, heavily marked up by him, is in the author's possession.

<sup>6</sup>WHH diary, 29 Sept., 7 Oct. 1938.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Jarvis, "The Senators from Vermont and Lend Lease, 1939–1941," (MA thesis, University of Vermont, 1974), 68.

<sup>8</sup>WHH diary, 1 January 1941.

<sup>9</sup>These five newspapers as well as the Middlebury College *Campus* and *Middlebury Register* were searched for the period January–March 1941.

<sup>10</sup>Based on press reports of meetings, petitions, and speeches, and locations of CDA local chapters.

<sup>11</sup>Arthur F. McGrath III, "The America First Committee in Vermont," (MA thesis, University of Vermont, 1998), 78.

<sup>12</sup>Schneider, *Should America Go to War?*, 117–118.

<sup>13</sup>Jarvis, "Senators from Vermont and Lend Lease," 68; McGrath, "America First Committee in Vermont," 19, fn. 39.

<sup>14</sup>WHH to Rev. Hugh Holland, 1 April 1941, and to Rev. Donald Trumbull, 12 March 1941, Lend Lease Correspondence, Box 258, Heinrichs Papers. For Middlebury see note 29.

<sup>15</sup>Robert David Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 219–221.

<sup>16</sup>Jarvis, "Senators from Vermont and Lend Lease," 80.

<sup>17</sup>As quoted in McGrath, "America First Committee," 26.

<sup>18</sup>*Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 4 March, 1941; *Rutland Herald*, 22 Feb. 1941.

<sup>19</sup>*Burlington Free Press*, 8 Feb. 1941; *Rutland Herald*, 18 Feb. 1941.

<sup>20</sup>On Aiken and Gibson, see Samuel B. Hand, "Friends, Neighbors, and Political Allies: Some Reflections on the Gibson-Aiken Connection," (University of Vermont Center for Research on Vermont, Occasional Paper No. 11, 1986), 1–14; Jarvis, "Senators from Vermont and Lend Lease," 40–46; Stephen M. Boyle, "The President Has Got to Eat His Spinach: Ernest W. Gibson, Jr. and Intervention, 1940," (MA thesis, University of Vermont, 1997), 12–16.

<sup>21</sup>WHH to Aiken, 23 July 1940, Aiken to WHH, 29 July 1940 (emphasis in original); WHH to Aiken, 9 Nov. 1940, and Aiken to WHH, undated but attached to WHH to Aiken, 9 Nov. 1940, all in Folder 18A, Box 4, Correspondence, Crate 60, George D. Aiken Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt. (hereafter cited as Aiken Papers).

<sup>22</sup>WHH to Aiken, 9 Nov. 1940, *ibid.*; Val Bowman column, *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 24 July 1940, Scrapbook, 1940, Box 2 (Clippings), Crate 60, Aiken Papers.

<sup>23</sup>*Boston Globe*, 18 Aug. 1940, Clippings Folder July–Dec. 1940, *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>*Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 18 July 1940, *Boston Globe*, 18 Aug., 1 Sept. 1940, Scrapbook 1940, *ibid.*; Aiken speech to Vermont American Legion, 19 Aug. 1940, speeches over Station WDEV (Waterbury), 19 Aug., 6 Sept., 2 Nov., Box 6, Bound Volumes of Speeches, Crate 48, Aiken Papers; E. H. Peet, campaign manager, to Mrs. Gertrude Daniels, 3 Aug. 1940, Folder 24, Box 4, Correspondence, Crate 60, Aiken Papers.

<sup>25</sup>WHH to Senator Warren R. Austin, 11 Jan. 1941, and to president, Vermont Chamber of Commerce, 11 Jan. 1941, Folder 51, World War II, 1941, James P. Taylor Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vt.

<sup>26</sup>*Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 4 Jan. 1941.

<sup>27</sup>James P. Taylor, secretary, Vermont Chamber of Commerce, to WHH, 15 Jan. 1941, Folder 51, Taylor Collection; *Burlington Free Press*, 8 Feb. 1941; *Journal of the House of the State of Vermont*, Special Session, 1940 and Biennial Session, 1941 (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press, 1941), 111 (6 Feb. 1941). The resolution was apparently adopted in the House by acclamation under a suspension of rules, as there is no vote count. Senator Austin denied offering amendments and the Vermont Senate buried the resolution in committee.

<sup>28</sup>*New York Herald Tribune*, 16 Jan. 1941.

<sup>29</sup>Middlebury College *Campus*, 7 May 1941. For information about the individuals in Middlebury, both for and against Lend Lease, I am grateful to Phyllis Brooks Cunningham of Middlebury.

<sup>30</sup>WHH diary, 3, 31 Jan. 1941 (emphasis in original); Middlebury College *Campus*, 5 Feb. 1941; *Rutland Herald*, 7 Jan., 3 Feb. 1941; *Burlington Free Press*, 3 Feb. 1941.

.....

<sup>31</sup> For information about Professor Everett Skillings, I am grateful to his daughter, Emily Skillings Palfrey; letter to author, 1 Dec. 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Middlebury College *Campus*, 15, 22 Jan. 1941.

<sup>33</sup> *Rutland Herald*, 28 Feb. 1941.

<sup>34</sup> This is a composite of reports on several of Heinrichs's speeches: *Burlington Free Press*, 18 Jan., 3 Feb., 8 March 1941; *Rutland Herald*, 7 Jan., 3, 28 Feb. 1941.

<sup>35</sup> Jarvis, "Senators from Vermont," 68–75; *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 6 Jan. 1941.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Record*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 25 Feb. 1941, vol. 87, pt. 2, 1360–1363; CBS speech, 6 March 1941, Box 6, Crate 48, Aiken Papers.

<sup>37</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 27 Feb., 1, 4, 5, 6 March 1941; Middlebury College *Campus*, 5 March 1941. The poll was not fair, as Michael Jarvis points out ("Senators From Vermont," 78). The question should have been, "Whose position most closely represents your opinion? Aiken? Austin?"

<sup>38</sup> "Letter to Senator Aiken," *Middlebury Register*, 7 March 1941.

<sup>39</sup> *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 3 March 1941; *Caledonian Record*, 28 Feb. 1941. Charles T. Morrissey and D. Gregory Sanford, "George David Aiken, That Man from Vermont: An Oral History" (typescript, 1981), 85, Folklore and Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

<sup>40</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 4 March 1941; *Rutland Herald*, 28 Feb. 1941.

<sup>41</sup> WHH statement, "Position Regarding War," *Burlington Free Press*, 8 March 1941.

<sup>42</sup> Boyle, "Gibson and Intervention," 62–66.

<sup>43</sup> Max H. Webster to WHH, 4 March, and WHH to Webster, 6 March 1941, Lend Lease Correspondence, Box 258, Heinrichs Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Evans statement, "Organization, Vermont Chapter, Fight For Freedom, Rutland, Nov. 1941" folder, Paul Evans Papers, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

<sup>45</sup> Aiken to WHH, 29 April 1941, Lend Lease Correspondence, Box 258, Heinrichs Papers; McGrath, "America First Committee," 75–84.

<sup>46</sup> Gertrude Daniels to WHH, 2 March 1941, WHH to Daniels, 5 March 1941, Dana L. Bowie to WHH, 28 Feb. 1941, WHH to Bowie, 4 March 1941, Rev. Donald Trumbull to WHH, 8 March 1941, WHH to Trumbull, 12 Mar 1941, all in Lend Lease correspondence, Box 258, Heinrichs Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrichs reentered the Army Air Corps in March 1942 and served as an intelligence officer in the 8th Air Force.

<sup>48</sup> Waldo [H.] Heinrichs [Jr.] *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27–31.

<sup>49</sup> Schneider, *Should America Go to War?*, 219–224.